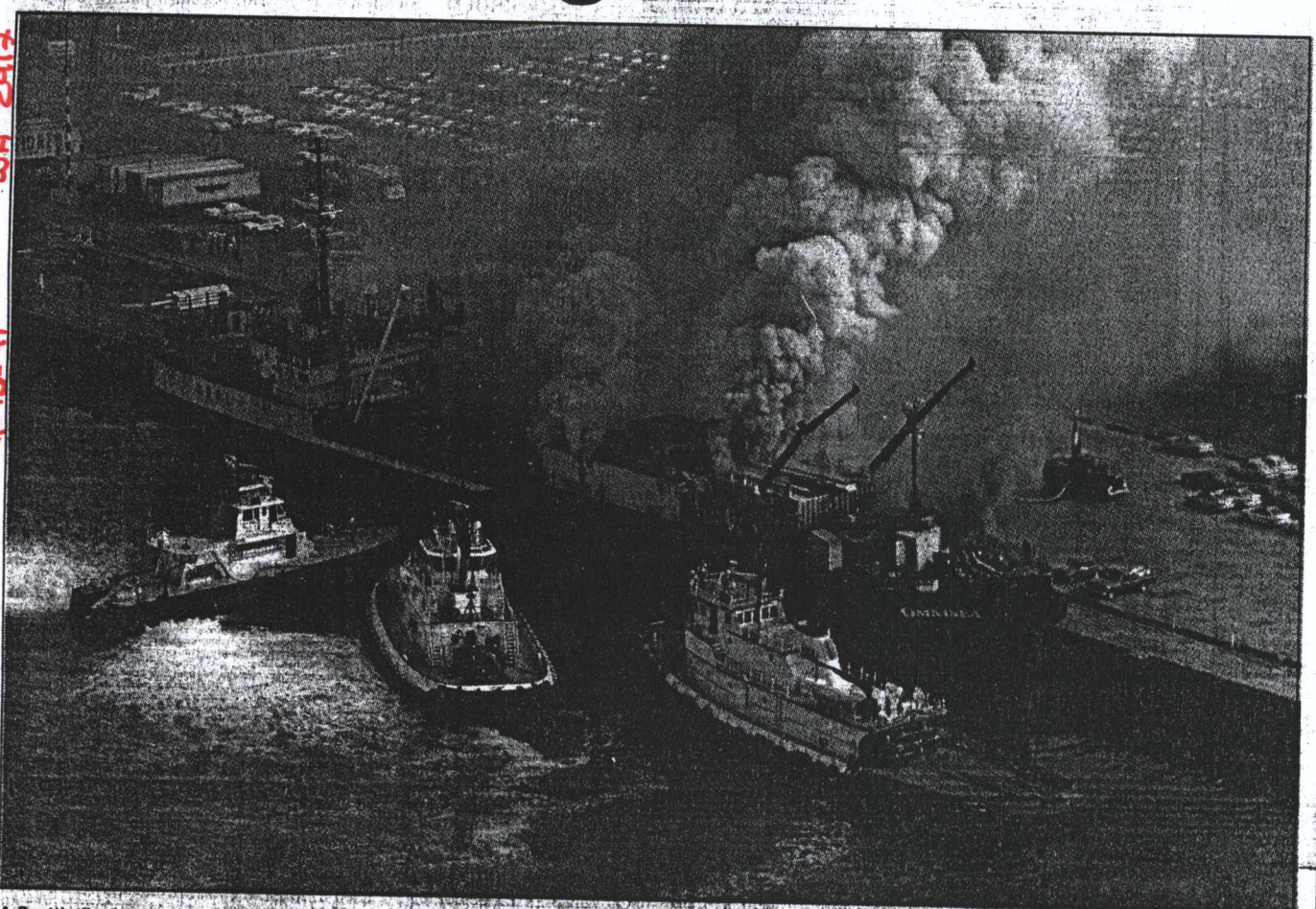


# Ship fire rages at Pier 91

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A Seattle fire boat and Foss tugs brace against the burning fish processor Omnisea, owned by Dutch Harbor Seafoods, at Pier 91 this morning. Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times

## Intense heat drives back firefighters; evacuations ordered

by Dee Norton  
Times staff reporter

A four-alarm fire raging aboard an Alaska fish-processing ship docked at Pier 91 near Magnolia belched columns of black smoke visible from much of the Seattle area this morning.

Two firefighters were taken to Harborview Medical Center. One was treated for unknown injuries and released. The other was still under observation at midday.

Heat from the fire, which broke

out deep in the hull of the Omnisea, was so intense it drove firefighters from the ship's deck and caused its paint to bubble and blister.

Seattle police said the ship contained 22,000 pounds of ammonia, which could explode. Fire and police officials ordered the evacuation of Piers 89, 90 and 91. A half-dozen other fish processors and several naval ships, including the USS Conquest, were moored at Piers 90 and 91.

"If it goes off, it's a big flash

vertically and it burns forever," said officer K.R. Jakobsen.

The 30 to 50 people working aboard the Omnisea were thought to have escaped safely.

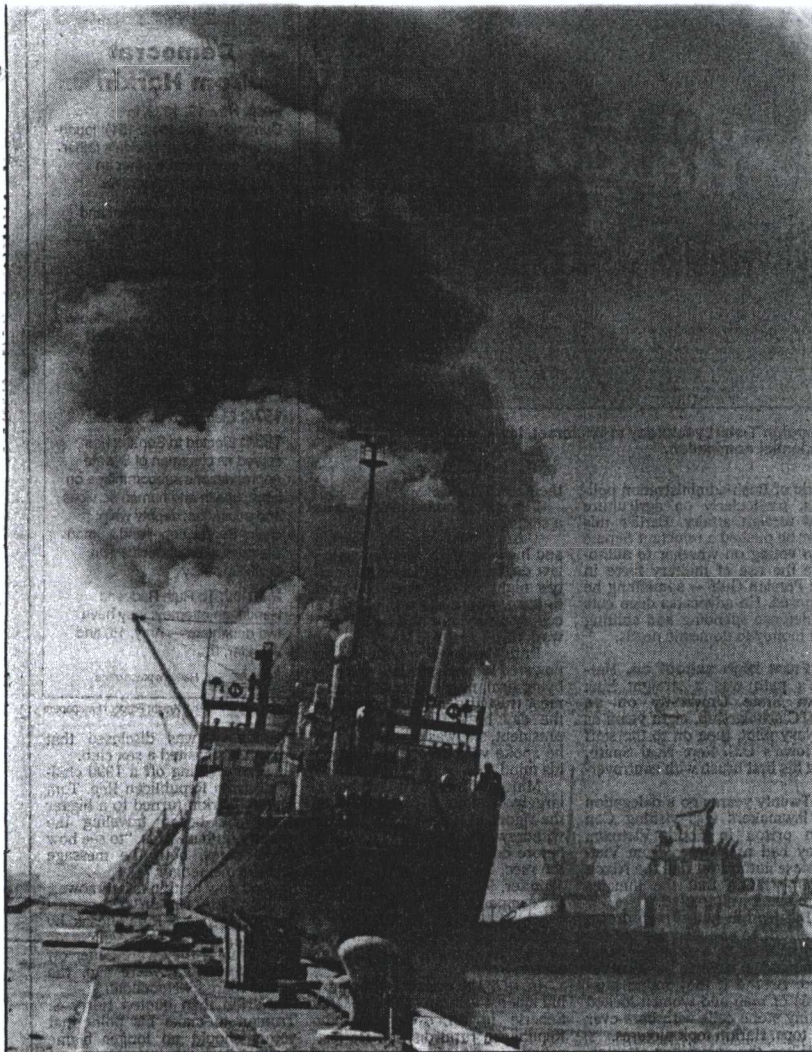
The vessel is owned by Dutch Harbor Seafoods, and has its home port in Juneau, Alaska.

According to the company operating the ship, Unisea Inc. of Redmond, the 46-year-old vessel was worth

Please see **BLAZE** on A 4







Greg Gilbert / Seattle Times

The 300-foot fish processor Omnisea lists at Pier 91 as clouds of smoke billow from the fire on board today.

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### BLAZE

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\$8 million. J. Richard Pace, Unisea Inc. president, said the loss of the Omnisea was extremely serious.

"It's very important to our process activity," Pace said. "As many as 30 boats depend upon it for their market and livelihood. Even if it's able to be repaired we could lose six months or more."

Reported at 9:45 this morning, the fire spread rapidly. Because the fire was below decks, firefighters had an extremely tough time getting to the blaze, said

Georgia Dean, Seattle Fire Department spokeswoman. Nearly two hours after the first alarm, firefighters were still unable to return to the vessel.

Nosed against the hull of the ship, the fireboat Chief Seattle aimed powerful sprays of water at the maindeck.

As firefighters on dock sprayed water on the hull, steam swirled over the pier and flames leapt from hatches on the maindeck. The 300-foot vessel was listing badly at midday, also making it difficult for firefighters to battle the blaze.

Although there was no official word on the cause of the fire, an engineer aboard the Omnisea said it may have been caused by a

welding operation.

Mike Rooker of Everett, the ship's first assistant engineer, was in his stateroom when he first saw smoke. He said insulation and wood in the ship's main hold appeared to be burning.

Two tugs, Justine Foss and Wedell Foss, were off the vessel's bow attempting to help firefighters by squirting small streams of water from their own fire-fighting equipment onto the vessel.

The ship arrived in port Aug. 1 for maintenance and repair and was scheduled to leave Oct. 23.

Times staff reporters Maria Williams and Tomas Guillen contributed to this story.